



STANFORD UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER

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STANFORD UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
Department of Genetics

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Dear Mrs. Shriver:

If I shared your philosophical position that the early fetus is indeed a human being, of course I would share your sense of outrage that it should be the object of experimentation. In all events, this is a matter that must be approached with the utmost of sensitivity.

In fact, as you know, I do not hold this view, and my moral distress is focussed on the misery that will be perpetuated if we do not learn more about prenatal and genetic disease, so that we may better help future generations. I do not defend callous and unnecessary experimentation, but I do fear serious inhibitions on the cautious and compassionate use of fetal tissues (in a fashion similar to our use of tissues from biopsy and autopsy of the adult) for a wide variety of important investigations. This is not the arena of my own research, but I can assure you of its importance.

Are you aware that about 800,000 human beings, by your hypothesis, that is to say fertilized human eggs, are lost every year in this country by natural failures during early pregnancy. Should you not also be outraged that we permit this to happen -- and at least a proportion of these losses should also be remediable if we but knew more about the biology of the fetus and of pregnancy.

Believe me, I do not regard these as questions with simple answers, and I hope you too will understand that moral dilemmas attend every course of action that might be advocated.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics